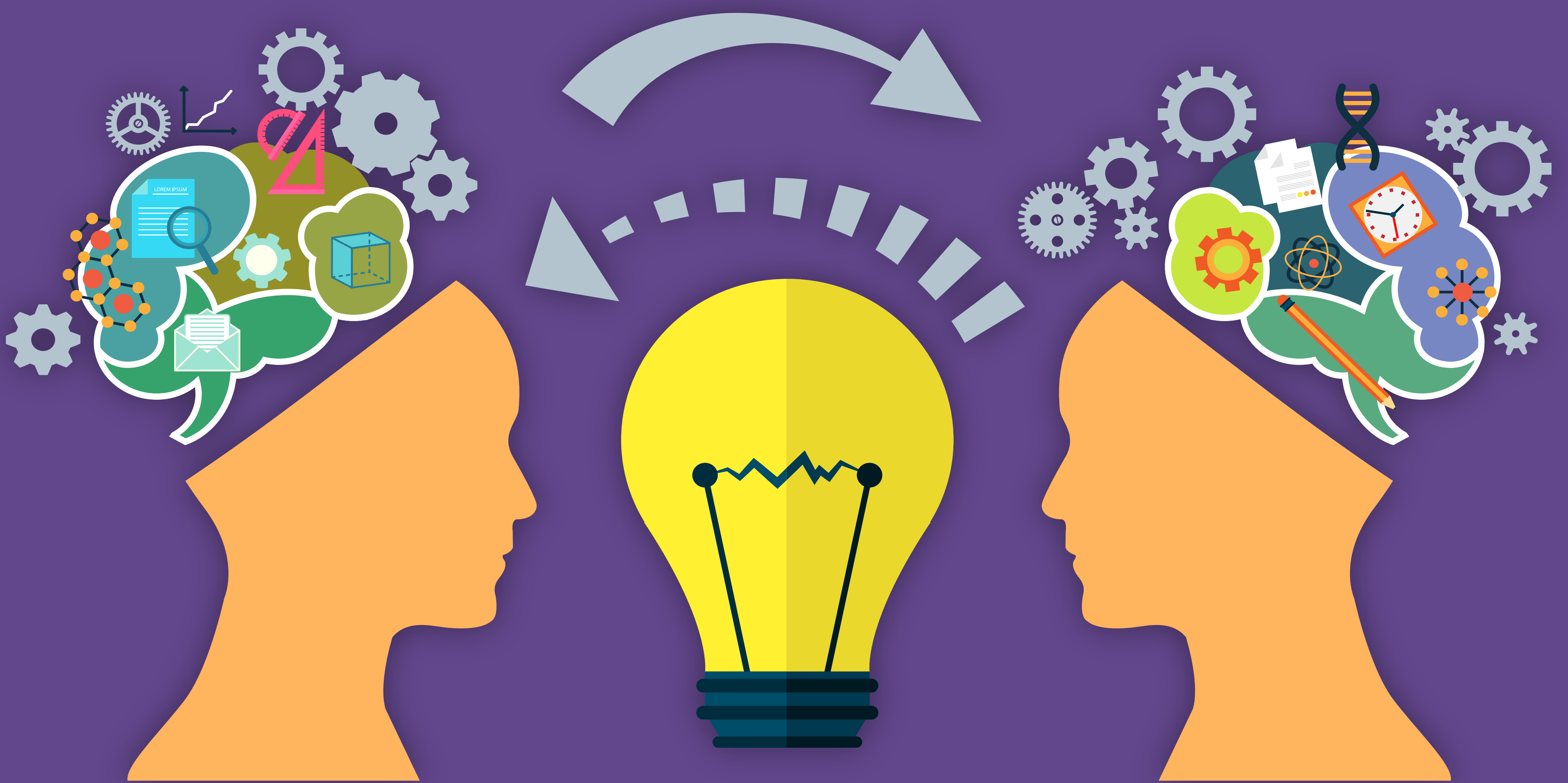


A Complete Guide to

Informational Interviews

For PhDs



By Cheeky Scientist

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What Is An Informational Interview

An informational interview is a conversation that you have with someone who works at a company or in a position that you are interested in learning about.

An informational interview is NOT an interrogation about how someone feels about working for a company or what they do in their job.

It is a conversation.

This is the most important thing to remember when doing an informational interview, because your informational interview is also your first impression.

But, don't be scared, when done correctly — a good informational interview can turn into an actual interview or into a quality referral.

"During a recent informational interview, I received an unexpected referral for a position at her company that just opened up."

— Cheeky Scientist Associate

“The conversation gave me a ton of useful info about the company, and some really good tips about their hiring process. At the end, my connection even asked me to send my résumé along with any job postings I’m interested in, so that she could get it to the proper hiring managers!”

— Cheeky Scientist Associate

“I just got done with my first informational interview. Although initially nervous, it went well. The person I spoke to was very forthright, and answered all my questions on the hiring process, work culture, etc. At the end of the call, he offered to push my résumé to the hiring manager.”

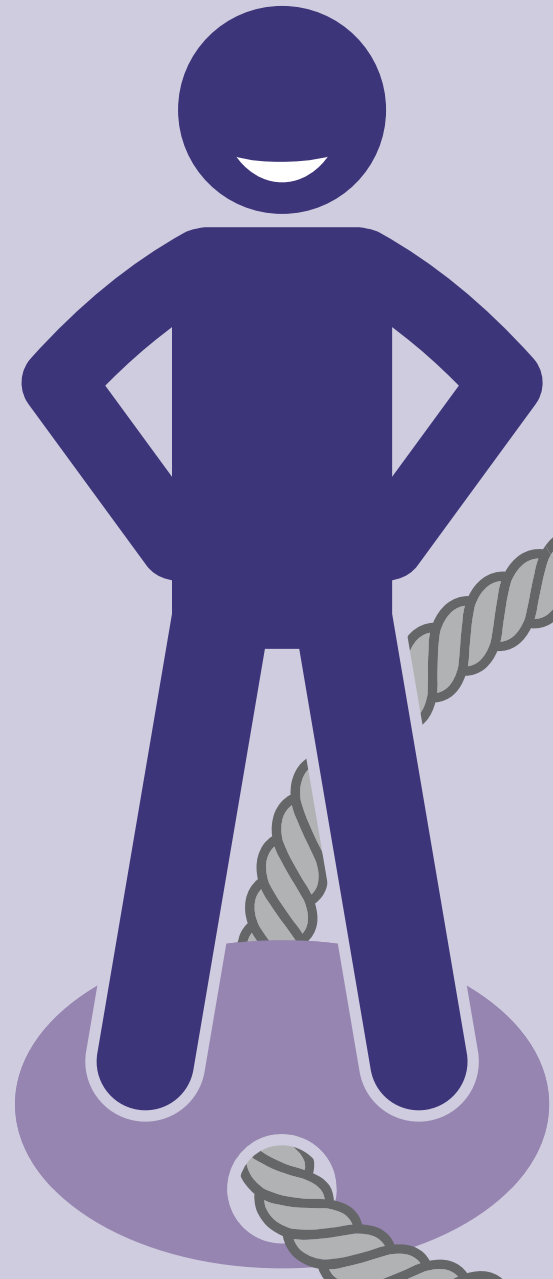
— Cheeky Scientist Associate

But if you never do the informational interview or you execute the interview poorly, you will not get these positive results.

An informational interview is networking one-on-one, it’s a conversation, it’s the beginning of a professional relationship, it’s a potential job referral — it’s something that should be a big part of your job search strategy.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

MORE THAN A CAREER-MAPPING TOOL



1

Personal

What is it like to work in this career

What parts of the job do you find the most challenging? The most enjoyable?

What is the typical salary range? What is the long-term salary potential?

How did you get started doing this type of work?

What most surprised you when you started working in this field?

Can you describe the work you do? What is a typical-day like?



2

Qualifications

What connections would be most helpful to get hired here?

What education, skills and experience are needed?

How does one get hired into this part of the organization?



How do my qualifications compare with employer expectations?

What are employers typically looking for when hiring people in this line of work?

What parts of the job do you find the most challenging? The most enjoyable?

What are the skills you use most in your work?



3

Landscape

What is the typical career path for people in this field?

How do you see this industry developing in the future? How is your Industry changing?

Why do people leave this field?

What advice would you give to someone who wants to get started in this industry?

What are the opportunities in this career path?

4

Leads

Could I follow you on LinkedIn?

May I have your business card?

Could you suggest one or two other people I could talk to about my career development?

Is there anything else you think I need to know?



Why You Should Do Informational Interviews

You can divide the benefits of an informational interview into 4 categories: learning about industry careers, growing your network, getting job referrals, and increasing your job satisfaction.

These benefits will result in your job search, and ultimately your industry career, being more successful.

Putting in more effort now (by doing informational interviews, instead of just uploading your résumé to job boards) will lead to more success in the long term.

55%

55% of PhD students are uncertain of their career path.

40%

40% of hires come from referrals, but, only 7% of applicants have a referral.

44%

Only 44% of universities' professional development programs contain any information about non-academic careers.

6.7%

A referral raises the wages of workers in their first year at a firm by $6.7 \pm 3.4\%$.

33%

Only 33% of graduate students felt that their university provided useful advice about careers outside of academia.

13%

By getting a referral from doing informational interviews, you can expect a 13% increase in your job-satisfaction level.

But, let's breakdown the specifics within each of those 4 main benefits.

1. Learn about industry careers.

Do you know what positions are available to you outside academia?

Do you know what it's like to work in industry?

Do you know which companies would best suit your desired professional lifestyle?

Probably not.

But, these are questions that many PhDs have as they begin their transition from academia to industry. A survey of graduate students found that a top concern for 55% of PhD students is their career path (*Nature*).

PhDs and PhD students can see the dysfunction of academia.

They can see the limited number of professorships and the dwindling funding resources.

PhDs are realizing that they don't want to stay in academia, but aren't sure what else is available because academia does not provide information about life outside the university to PhDs and postdocs.

According to a survey of more than 800 university staff members from 226 institutions, only 62% of respondents reported that their university provides some type of professional development for PhDs (*Council of Graduate Schools*).

A huge portion of those institutions are not providing ANY professional development for staff.

But, of the 62% that do provide professional development, the professional development available often focuses exclusively on academic careers. According to the same survey, of the 62% that reported some type of professional development, only 44% have professional development programs that contain information about non-academic careers.

This is hugely disappointing!.

And, PhD students are the ones who are suffering. Only 33% of graduate students felt that their university provided useful advice about careers outside of academia (Nature). If your university is not going to teach you about the opportunities that lie outside of academia, then you are going to learn about them yourself. And, conducting informational interviews with industry professionals gives you a direct line to what is happening in industry.

By having many conversations with a variety of people working in industry you can learn about many companies and many types of positions.

You can ask people specific questions about their work to discover what positions are a good fit for you and which positions you should avoid. As a PhD, you are qualified for any industry position you want. But this thought can be overwhelming when you have no clue what positions are available or what someone in a particular position does.

Start small by setting up and executing informational interviews with industry professionals in companies or positions that sound interesting to you. Go into the interview, curious and open. You will certainly learn a lot, and the more interviews you do, the more obvious it will become which industry positions are a good fit for you.

2. Grow your professional network.

As you are conducting informational interviews you will of course find that not every job and not every company is what you want. This is the point of informational interviews. You are trying to find your ideal industry job.

But that does not mean that conversations you have with people in positions you don't want, or at companies you end up not being a fit for, are a waste of time.



Every single conversation that you have, expands your network.

The one-on-one nature of informational interviews makes them perfect for developing a real connection with the other person, a connection that can be cultivated to last a lifetime. And the depth and quality of your networking matters now and in your future.

Research by Ron Burt from the University of Chicago, demonstrates that the number one predictor of career success is the size and openness of your network; where more connections with a wider array of people is indicative of higher levels of career success (*Annual Review of Psychology*).

Starting your industry career by conducting lots of informational interviews with a diverse group of people, and then investing in these relationships is the perfect way to lay the foundation for a successful long-term career.

Another study found that successful industry professionals spend 70% more-time networking than their less successful counterparts (*Academy of Management Journal*).

Remember, behind every hiring decision, there is a person.

A computer does not ever make that final hiring decision or the final decision on who gets the promotion, a person does.

It is your connections with people that will make the difference in the success of your job search, and the success of your overall career.

3. Get more job referrals.

80% of job openings are never advertised.

This statistic is often met with disbelief, but it has been reported over and over again by major outlets — including Forbes, NPR, PayScale, Fortune, Wall Street Journal, and Business Insider (just to name a few).

The unadvertised job market is something that you need to gain access to, because this is where the majority of job openings are located. If you are only applying to positions that you see advertised online, then you only have access to the tip of the iceberg.

Doing informational interviews allows you to meet and build a relationship with lots of industry professionals. And it's the building relationships part that is the most important.

The environment of a one-on-one informational interview versus a crowded networking event makes it easier to forge a real connection with the person you are interviewing, and thus, you are more likely to get a referral.

Getting a referral is a key benefit of doing informational interviews because 40% of hires come from referrals, but, only 7% of applicants have a referral (*Undercover Recruiter*).

A referral makes you stand out from the crowd of applicants.

Many companies use applicant tracking software to screen résumés and the vast majority of submitted résumés are never even seen by a human. A referral gets you past that process and usually will catapult you straight to the interview stage.

Employee referrals account for 72% of all interviews (*Society of Human Resource Management*).

Having a referral not only increases your chance of getting an interview and your chance of getting hired, but it also increases your starting salary.

A study in *The Review of Economic Studies* journal found that a referral raises wages of workers in their first year at a firm by $6.7 \pm 3.4\%$.

A 6.7% increase is substantial. It's an increase in starting salary from \$75,000 to \$80,000 per year.

Companies place a lot of value on referrals because ultimately, job candidates who come from referrals make better employees. As a PhD, you already have many advantages over other job candidates, and with a referral you will immediately become a top candidate.

4. Increase your job satisfaction.



There are 52 weeks in a year and the average American will spend 46.8 weeks at work — that's 90% of your entire year (*Pew Research*). Before you make a commitment to spend so much of your time somewhere, you need to do your research.

Informational interviews are how you can learn about a company before you work there.

As a PhD with little to no industry knowledge, you must do research before you decide to work for a company. Each company has a different culture, a different vibe, and a different expectation of its employees.

If you work expectations and vision do not align with the company that you choose to work for, it is recipe for disaster.

If you do not identify with the place you work, you will not stay long and you will not be happy.

A large portion of failed hires, meaning people who leave the company within 18 months, are caused by poor cultural fit. It has been reported that as much as 89% of hiring failures are due to poor cultural fit (*Forbes*).

Company culture is everything from how the company is organized, to how they communicate, to how they dress — and, it's all important.

Poor cultural fit leaves an employee feeling out of place and unsatisfied. Informational interviews allow you to learn about the culture of a company, and ask questions to determine if you are a good fit.

When you do find that right company, where you align with their values and you get a referral from doing so many informational interviews, you can expect a 13% increase in your job-satisfaction level (*Undercover Recruiter*).

As a PhD, you have many advantages over other job candidates, and will bring a lot of value to any company you join.

But, to make sure that you also gain value, and are satisfied with the company you choose, you must do your research. Informational interviews are the best way to learn about a variety of companies and positions during your job search.

What You Need to Do Before Setting Up an Informational Interview

So, now you're convinced that informational interviews are an integral part of your job-search strategy. You know there is so much you can gain by simply doing these interviews.

But, before you rush out and start setting up as many of these interviews as you can, there are a few things you need to do first.

Before you do informational interviews, you need to “get your house in order”.

Just like you would clean up your house before inviting someone over, you need to get your professional profiles in shape before reaching out to people. This means you need to make sure that both your LinkedIn profile and your résumé are top-notch.

If your LinkedIn profile is a mess and you reach out to new people, they probably will just ignore you.

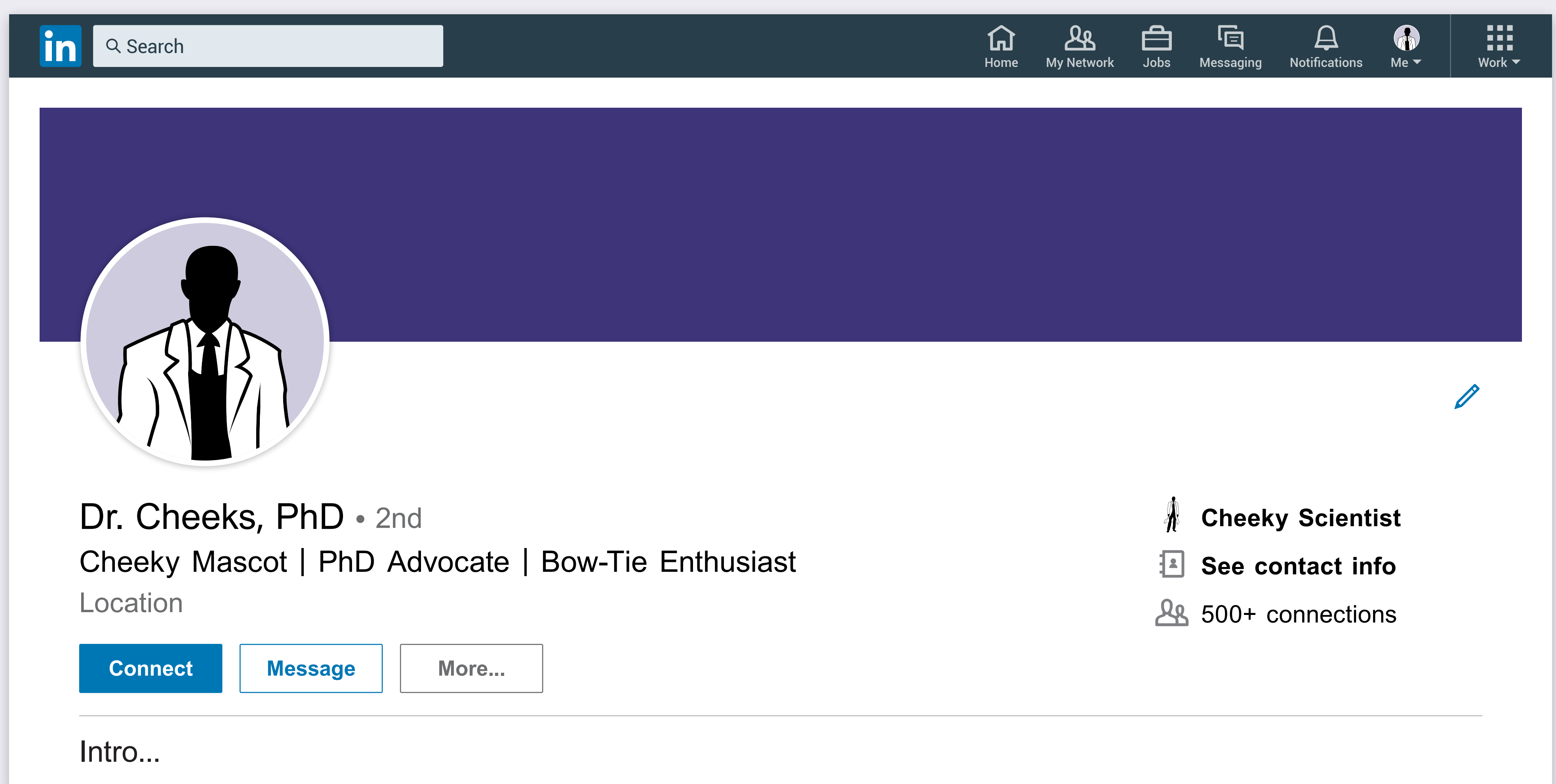
If you have a great informational interview, and the other person asks you for your résumé to pass along to the hiring manager — but you

send them a terrible, academic-style CV — they probably won't pass that résumé along, after all.

Before setting up informational interviews, take the time to fix up your LinkedIn profile and your résumé.

Here are a few tips on what to do in order to make you professional profiles “informational-interview” ready.

1. Create a professional LinkedIn profile.



Your LinkedIn profile is the professional impression that you are giving to the more than 500-million people who use the LinkedIn platform.

If you have a bad LinkedIn profile, it's likely that your informational-interview requests will be denied based on that poor profile.

But, what can you do to improve your LinkedIn profile?

What makes a profile seem professional and respectable?

It's actually quite simple.

2. Have a quality, professional-style profile picture.

A bad or non-existent profile picture is a definite way to have your connection requests denied, and messages ignored.

Having no picture or a picture of something that is not you, makes your profile seem fake! Someone you don't know is not going to connect with you if they cannot see you.

You must have a photo before you reach out to people for informational interviews, if you expect to get good responses. Profiles with a photo receive 21-times more views and 36-times more messages than profiles without a photo (*LinkedIn*).

But, you shouldn't have just any photo of yourself as your profile picture.

Your profile picture should look professional. You should be wearing business attire (not a lab coat). You would never go to an interview in casual clothes or looking dishevelled, and the same should be true for your profile picture.

Put some sincere effort into this photo, just like you do for the other parts of your job search — don't just take a selfie!

Finally, your picture needs to be inviting, so a smiling photo should be used. You want to look confident and approachable. You want to look like someone who would be great to work with. A smiling, bright and high-quality photograph will give a great first impression to anyone you invite to your LinkedIn profile.

3. Write a headline that describes who you are professionally.

If your headline on LinkedIn is "Postdoc/Graduate Researcher at XYZ University" you have already set yourself up for failure.

Instead, your headline should contain the words that are associated with your professional future.

Ask yourself: *What is my goal? Who is my target audience? What are my keywords?*

Even if you are still unsure about the exact job that you want to get in industry, you still need to update this headline to something that is not academic.

You can start by including a few items in your headline, and then modify it as you learn what positions you want to target. For the most basic headline include: your field, your most important transferable skill, and something that humanizes you — such as a hobby. And if you know the types of positions you want to target, put that in there as well.

Here are a few examples to help you create your person headline:

Science Communicator | Relationship Builder | Classical Pianist

Project Manager | Exceptional Problem Solver | Knitter

Experienced Chemist | Peptide Expert | Team Player | Rock Climber

4. Write a professional summary that is personal and engaging — do not just copy/paste your résumé.

The summary section on your LinkedIn profile is not a place to rewrite your résumé.

Besides your headline, this is the first part of your profile that anyone will see. So, the purpose of this section is to explain “who you are” in an inviting way.

Write this part of your profile in the first person, as if you are talking to the reader.

Think of this part of your LinkedIn profile as the elevator pitch. Introduce yourself, what you do, what you are passionate about, and what you want to accomplish.

Provide a reason for the person to continue reading your profile, and a reason to say yes to your informational interview request.

5. Write an industry-ready résumé.

A bad résumé can keep you from getting a position despite doing everything else right.

Even if you have a great informational interview and score a referral, a bad résumé can ruin that opportunity.

Your résumé is often the first written item you will show to a potential employer — it's your first impression!

And, first impressions are hard to break.

So, what does your résumé say about you?

Do you know what an industry résumé should look like?

Or does your résumé look like an academic CV?

Before you have an informational interview, you must prepare an industry-ready résumé.

6. Leave lots of white space on your résumé.

As a PhD, you have many accomplishments. This means you have many advantages over other job candidates, but that does not mean that you

need to list every single accolade you have in your résumé.

Your industry résumé should be short and sweet.

It should highlight the accomplishments that your potential employer will care about the most. And, it's important that you don't try to squeeze too much information into your short industry résumé, because that will make it look crowded.

It will look messy and crowded if you do not leave enough white space.

Lots of white space and a clean, crisp layout will make your résumé look professional, and increase your chance of getting an interview.

7. Write your bullets in the correct format: transferable skill + technical skills + result.

Do not just list your tasks or duties on your résumé, and do not write entire paragraphs as your bullet points.

This is a waste!

Instead, make the most of each bullet point by including the 3 key parts of a winning bullet point. Start by highlighting your transferable skills, also known as your soft skills. In industry, these skills actually matter more than your technical skills.

Follow the transferable skill with a technical skill that is relevant to the position you are applying for.

End the bullet point with a clear industry-relevant result which demonstrates what you know is important in industry.

8. Tailor the résumé for the specific position.

Each position that you apply for, should have a unique résumé that is based on the position you are applying for.

That means, you need to study job postings and descriptions to identify the most prominent keywords used, and then tailor your résumé with those exact keywords.

It's not just about the keywords, though. You should tailor your résumé, specifically, to each and every job you apply for. This might seem like a lot of work for just one application, and you're right, it is. But that is the point.

Tailoring your résumé will separate you from other qualified job candidates.

You either want the job, or you don't — and this is what it takes if you want it. Hiring managers can spot a generic résumé a mile away, and if you haven't taken the time to tweak your résumé for the job at hand, they likely won't take the time to interview you.

Be ready with this tailored résumé before your informational interview, in case they ask for your résumé.

9. Identify your core values.

Before you can ask good questions during an informational interview, you need to identify what you are looking for in a job. *What type of environment are you looking for? What type of pay? What type of work-life balance are you searching for?*

You need to identify your core values. These core values are your judgement of what is important in life and it is ultimately the foundation from which you make decisions.

Broadly these values are broken down into 3 categories:

Intrinsic values — intangible rewards related to satisfaction and motivation, such as helping others.

Extrinsic values — tangible rewards, such as job title (prestige), salary or benefits (wealth).

Lifestyle values — these govern how you live your life, such as when and where you holiday, and how you spend your leisure time.

This is a very reflective task and it can be difficult to figure out what your core values are. But is essential to find the industry position that is best for you. There are TONS of companies and positions out there, knowing your values helps to narrow them down.

But remember, identifying your core value is a process and your answers are not set in stone, but it will provide you with a place to start asking questions. As you complete more and more informational interviews, you will be able to hone these values and figure out what positions and companies are a good fit for you.

[This article](#) is a great place to start identifying your core values.

How to Setup an Informational Interview

Now that you have done the prep work — you have a professional LinkedIn profile, an industry-ready résumé, and are clear on your core values — it's time to set up your first informational interview.

This section will discuss setting a goal for your informational interview, finding the person you want to interview, and what to write when requesting informational interview.

1. Setting a goal for your informational interview.

Informational interviews are a valuable addition to your career transition. They can provide immense value to your job search. But every person that you interview will have something different to offer. So, before your informational interview, set a goal for the interview. *What do you want to achieve?*

Do you want to foster a new connection? Do you want to better understand



the day-to-day activities of a particular position? Do you want to learn about a company's culture? Do you want to learn what path you should take to get into a particular role?

The list of questions goes on and on.

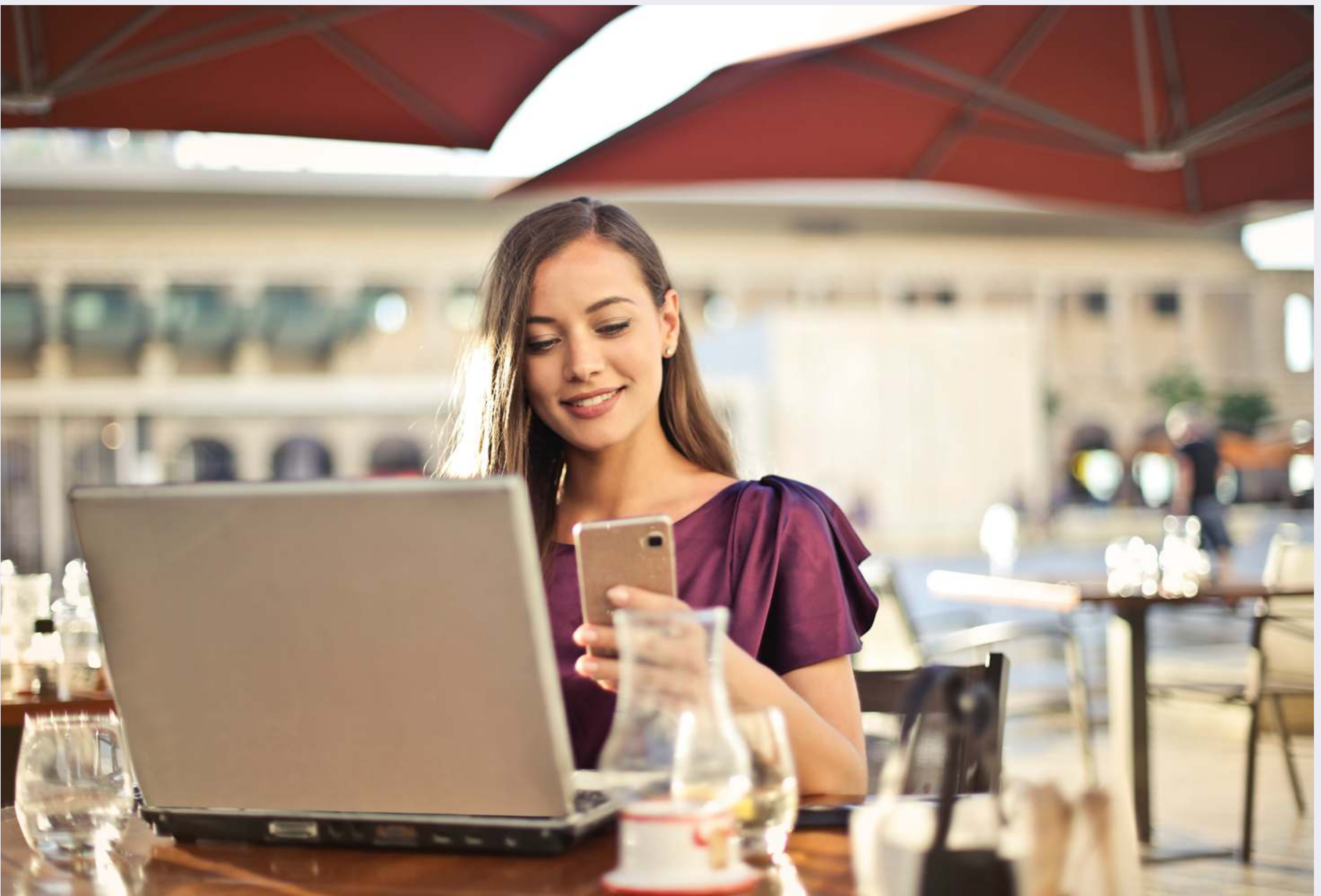
But, for the sake of time and the sanity of the person you are interviewing, you must decide on a main goal before you have the interview. This doesn't mean that if you go off topic the interview is a failure. But it gives you a place to focus.

Informational interviews allow you to decide if a company or a particular industry position is a good fit for you — before you get hired.

You should do many informational interviews with many different people. Each time you will come away with new insight. Informational interviews are a strategic way to build meaningful connections with industry professionals, while investigating which positions and companies are of interest to you.

You can read about a company's mission online. You can learn about employee salaries and the newest products a company has online. But, you cannot learn what it is like to walk into the same office — day after day — from the Internet. The only way to really understand what it's like to work for a company, or work in a particular position — on a day-to-day basis — is to talk to someone in those roles. And, an informational interview is your window into a company or position.

2. Deciding who to interview and finding them.



Tip #1: Do not set up the very first informational interview with someone you don't know.

This is very likely to backfire and be a disaster. When you think about setting up an informational interview, your first instinct is probably to try and reach out to a director at a large company. This instinct is wrong.

Instead, the foolproof way to secure an informational interview is to start with people you already have within your network. Most PhDs vastly undervalue their current network.

Your network is your friends, family, alumni, professors, or colleagues from previous jobs. Ask everyone you know for potential contacts in a field, company, or job that interests you. In the early stages, keep your options open. Don't limit yourself to informational interviews with only 'high-profile' contacts.

The major benefit in setting up an informational interview with someone in your current network is that you already have a rapport with that person. They know you or know someone you know. This means they are already willing to share with you, and more willing to accept your informational-interview invitation.

Get comfortable with the informational-interview process by interviewing people you already know well.

Also, don't limit yourself to setting up informational interviews for only one or two positions that you think you want the most. Even if someone's position seems outside your area of immediate interest, it can prove to be helpful in the future. You will learn first-hand information that can make a position more attractive than it seemed previously.

The goal of starting out with people you know is to slowly build up your experience interviewing other people. And when you become more comfortable and confident in your interviewing skills, you can reach out to the more 'high-profile' contact that you want to interview.

When you are ready to reach out to new connections to set-up informational interviews, you need to do some research first. LinkedIn is the best platform to search for employees at companies that interest you. However, BEFORE you reach out to anyone through LinkedIn, ensure your LinkedIn profile is complete, up-to-date, and professional (see section above for tips to get your profile looking good).

Your potential contact will absolutely look at your profile before deciding whether or not to reply. Lacking a professional LinkedIn photo or having an incomplete profile will immediately end your chances for making a connection. Professionals want to connect with other professionals. They do not want to connect with people who appear unprofessional.

The LinkedIn search feature is very powerful and you should use it when finding people to interview. And there are a few basic guidelines you should follow to identify people who will probably give you quality informational interviews.

1. Search for people who are in the positions you want or who work at companies you want to work for. If you have a shared connection with someone of interest, see if you can get an introduction. An introduction will increase the success rate of your informational interview requests.
2. Focus on people who have been in their current position less than 2 years, as they are usually more willing to share and remember what it's like to be in your position.
3. Target other PhDs who have recently transitioned, because they know what it's like to be in your shoes.

3. Asking someone to have an informational interview with you.

Most of the time you will be requesting an informational interview via email or LinkedIn message. So, proper email etiquette will increase your chances of getting a response. This is especially true when reaching out to professionals you have no prior connection with.

The key is to keep your requests short and to the point. If your email is 100 words or less, it is more likely to be read. Be respectful enough to be brief and accurate. Don't begin your message with, *"Hi, I'm a PhD interested in blah blah blah..."* No one has the time to read through a long-winded email describing your life story and deepest desires.



When asking for an informational interview, your message should focus on the other person, not on you. You are demonstrating your interest in them, their role, and their company. This is important because you need to add value before you ask for something. Focusing on the other person and giving them an opportunity to talk about themselves and their job is a way to add value.

It is important that you give before you take. If you haven't given the other person anything yet, you should NOT be asking for anything. Every informational interview begins by adding value. The value you add does not have to be work-related but it should show that you would like to build a connection with them through mutual appreciation.

And, while people do enjoy talking about themselves and sharing their stories, they do not like it when someone monopolizes their time. Your message needs to make it obvious that you understand this. Be specific about if you want to talk in person or on the phone, and for how long you want to talk. You can even mention that you just have a couple of questions to ask them about their role.

A few sample scripts that you could use to add value and ask for an informational interview are below:

1

Hi [Name],

I wanted to reach out and congratulate you on your recent [promotion/ other achievement]! I have been wanting to learn more about [ABC company/position] and it would be very valuable to hear your thoughts. Do you have time for a 5-minute chat?

Thank you!

[Your Name]

2

Hi [Name],

I recently read the article you wrote about [XYZ topic] and really enjoyed it. In particular, I found [ABC idea] intriguing and it made me think about [XYZ idea].

I really enjoyed reading your article and was wondering if you have any further reading recommendations?

Thank you!

[your name]

And then follow up with:

Hi [Name],

I hope you are well.

I have enjoyed your reading recommendations and your insight into [XYZ field]. I am interested in learning more about XYZ field/position and would value hearing about your experiences. Do you have time to meet up for a 15-minute coffee next week?

Thank you!

[Your Name]

3

Hi [Name],

I found your profile on LinkedIn during my search about XYZ position/company. I am interested in learning more about XYZ position/company and would value your opinion. Do you have time for a brief 5-minute chat?

Thank you!

[Your Name]

P.S. [Insert compliment, such as, "I love the quote you have on your LinkedIn profile!"]

4

Hi [Name],

I really enjoyed reading the post you made in the [XYZ LinkedIn group] about [ABC topic]. Thank you for sharing it with the group. I am interested in learning more about [ABC topic] and would value hearing your perspective. Do you have time for a brief 5-minute phone conversation where I can ask you a couple of questions about [XYZ idea/position]?

Thank you!

[Your Name]

P.S. I am also a member of [ABC LinkedIn group] where people often post insightful articles about [ABC topic] as well, so I thought you might like to check it out [insert link].

5

Hi [Professional Name],

I came across your profile on LinkedIn and saw that we are both alumni of [school name]. Do you get back there often? Congratulations on your recent promotion. I am currently exploring new career opportunities and would value your advice on working in [area/industry/position]. Are you available for a 5-minute phone call next week?

Let me know what day and time works for you.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

How to Conduct an Informational Interview

First thing to remember when conducting an informational interview — it is not an interrogation.

It is not a series of questions, but rather, a conversation. A conversation with someone who was kind enough to make time for you. This means that you need to remember to always begin your conversation by saying, *“Thank you”*.

Come prepared with a few questions based on the goal you have for this particular informational interview. But, let the person you are chatting with speak freely and use the questions you have prepared only to gently guide the conversation. If you go off topic, that’s a good thing as it shows you are building rapport with the person.

The final thing to remember when having the interview is to stick to the time frame that you gave. If you told the other person you would chat with them for 10 minutes, then only chat for 10 minutes. If you want to keep talking, then ask if they are willing to schedule another time to talk more. For example, if your initial conversation is over the phone, and you would like to learn more from them, then perhaps you

can request them an in-person meetup.

Always be genuine and respect the other person. This is the only way to build up a quality professional relationship.

Below is a list of 50 informational interview questions to ask during an informational interview, broken down based on the flow of the interview. But remember, NEVER ask all of these questions in one interview. Just choose the ones that will help you achieve the goal you have for the interview.

Informational Interview Stages

The Beginning: Learning about the other person	The Middle: Learning about the company/position	The End: Asking for specific advice or next steps
❶ How did you get into [insert field]?	❶ What is [insert company] culture like?	❶ Is there anyone else at [insert company] I should talk with?
❷ What is your typical day like?	❷ Do you work on weekends?	❷ What advice would you give to someone in my position?
❸ What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?	❸ How do you collaborate with your colleagues?	❸ How would you describe someone who would excel in this role?

The Beginning:

Learning about the other person

The beginning of your informational interview is the time when you need to break the ice and get the conversation flowing.

To accomplish this, it works best to focus on asking questions about the person you are speaking with.

Try to customize your questions whenever possible, because this shows that you have done your homework and that you are actually listening.

Here are 20 questions that you could ask at the beginning of an informational interview...

1. *How did you initially learn about [insert role]?*
2. *Could you describe what you do on a typical day? For example, what did you do yesterday?*
3. *What types of skills and experiences do you think have been key to your success as [insert position]?*
4. *How did you get into [insert field]? What path led you to [current position]?*
5. *What's been particularly rewarding about the path you've taken?*
6. *What do you like about your work environment?*
7. *What are the fastest growth areas within [insert company]?*
8. *What are the most promising new products or areas of research in [insert company]?*
9. *What previous professional experiences have helped you most in [insert role]?*
10. *What's something that would surprise people about your day-to-day?*
11. *What are some of the biggest rewards of [insert position]?*
12. *I know that you worked as a/an [insert previous position] previously, but how did you start out in [insert current industry]?*
13. *What are your current responsibilities?*
14. *Where do you see your career going from here?*

15. *Where do you see the [insert field] industry going?*
16. *How have your educational and work backgrounds led you to [insert current position]?*
17. *When and how did you decide to move into [insert field]?*
18. *How have your responsibilities changed since you began working at [insert company]?*
19. *Did you have previous experience in [insert field] before you started working in your current role?*
20. *What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?*

The Middle:

Learning about the company/position

An informational interview is a wonderful opportunity to learn more details about the company and position that you are interested in.

Don't just ask basic questions that you can Google the answer to.

Ask about culture and work-life balance.

Ask questions about what matters to you.

Here are 20 questions you can ask to learn more about the company and position...

1. *What are the pros and cons of working as a/an [insert position]?*
2. *Do you have a lot of free time outside of work?*
3. *What does your career trajectory look like?*
4. *What is [insert company] culture like?*
5. *How long do people tend to work at [insert company]?*
6. *What has been your biggest challenge as a/an [insert role]?*
7. *What do you dislike about [insert company]?*
8. *Are there many avenues for you to advance within [insert company]?*
9. *Who do you report to?*

10. *How do you communicate with other employees at [insert company]?*
11. *Do you work on the weekends?*
12. *What are some of the future career opportunities for someone in your position?*
13. *What makes [insert company] a particularly good place to work?*
14. *I read about [insert trend] on [insert company's website]. What do you think about this development?*
15. *How would you describe the management style and organization of [insert company]?*
16. *Do you manage other people? What do the people who work for you do?*
17. *How does your team respond when faced with a deadline?*
18. *How do you collaborate with other employees?*
19. *I read that these are the core company values: [insert values]. How do these impact your day-to-day activities?*
20. *What type of personalities fit in best at [insert company]?*

The End:

Asking for specific advice or next steps

The last part of your informational interview is when you can begin to ask for more specific advice.

This is your opportunity to ask questions specific to the company or position that you want to know, but that haven't been discussed yet.

And always be sure to ask about next steps.

Here are 10 questions you can ask to get advice and learn the best ways to move forward with your job search...

1. *Is there anyone else at [insert company] you think it would be good for me to talk to?*
2. *What advice would you give to someone, such as me, who wants to secure a [insert position] role?*

3. *What are the common qualities of individuals who are successful in [insert position]?*
 4. *What's one thing you wish somebody would've told you before going into [insert field]?*
 5. *What type of work samples or portfolio should I be trying to develop as I try to move into [insert position]?*
 6. *What advice would you give someone in my position who wants to be successful in [insert field]?*
 7. *When you think about your first year as [insert role], what actions/activities were key to your success?*
 8. *How would you describe somebody who would excel in [insert position]?*
 9. *What experiences best prepared you for [insert position]?*
 10. *From the research and informational interviews I've done so far, I've developed a list of companies in [insert field] that I am interested in. Is there anything you can tell me about these companies? Are there companies I've left out that you think I should look at more closely?*
-

How to Follow Up After an Informational Interview

Just as you began your informational interview by saying “*Thank you*”, you should follow up your informational interview with a thank you note. Refusing to follow up is a deal breaker.

Following up is an effective way to keep in touch, be remembered, and show that you are grateful for someone else’s time. Neglecting to follow up, on the other hand, will unravel any meaningful conversations that you previously had. Do not throw away the effort that you put into building this connection.

If you have communicated solely by email prior to meeting, an email thank-you note can suffice. However, a ‘hard-copy’ thank-you note sent through the post is preferred, as it leaves a lasting impact on the receiver.

Importantly, be specific in your message by quoting something that you spoke about during your interview, or including a link relating to a topic that was discussed. It helps if you write this thank-you note right after your interview.



You want to let the other person know they made a significant impression on you. This will keep the door open to developing the relationship further. Such as by providing you with a referral in the future.

Here is a short follow-up message you could send after an informational interview:

Hi [Professional Name],

Thank you for meeting with me today.

It was great to discuss [topic] with you. I really appreciate the insight you provided and will be [action to take] just as you suggested. I'll be sure to let you know what happens and please let me know if I can repay the favor in any way.

Thanks again for your time.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

P.S. I've attached a link to the article on the [topic] we discussed. Let me know what you think about [specific point].

Continue to foster the relationship with your new connection well after your interview is over, and after you have sent the initial thank-you note. Connect with them through LinkedIn, endorse their skills, and follow their achievements online. Interact with posts that they make on LinkedIn.

Act as though you are peer sponsoring them, not a fan kissing up to them.

Find as many ways as possible to add value, professionally. Congratulate them for a promotion, pass along an article or conference of interest, or simply write to them to discuss current events in the field.

Follow up regularly, but not too often. Once a month is a good place to start.

Now, because you have followed up and stayed on this person's radar, when a position opens up at their company — you are in a good position to ask them for a referral. This can be in the form of asking for the name of the hiring manager, or simply asking to mention their name as a reference in a cover letter.

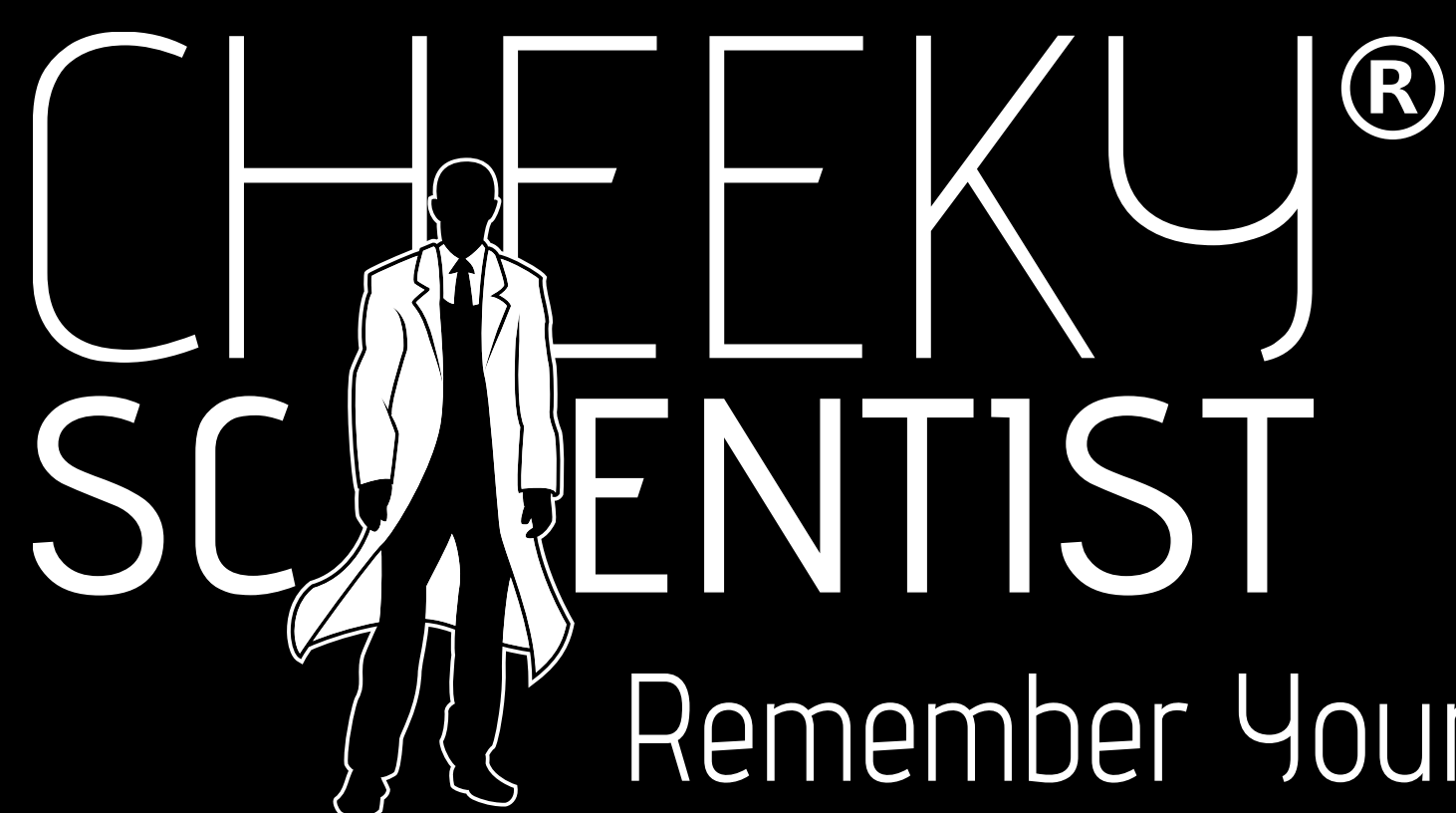
When it comes to hosting an informational interview, it's important to have this kind of long-term strategy in place. Your goal is to build a lasting professional relationship that you can add value to, and turn to for help over and over again. Your goal is NOT to ask for a quick favor and drop the other person forever. Play the long game.

Stay Cheeky!



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